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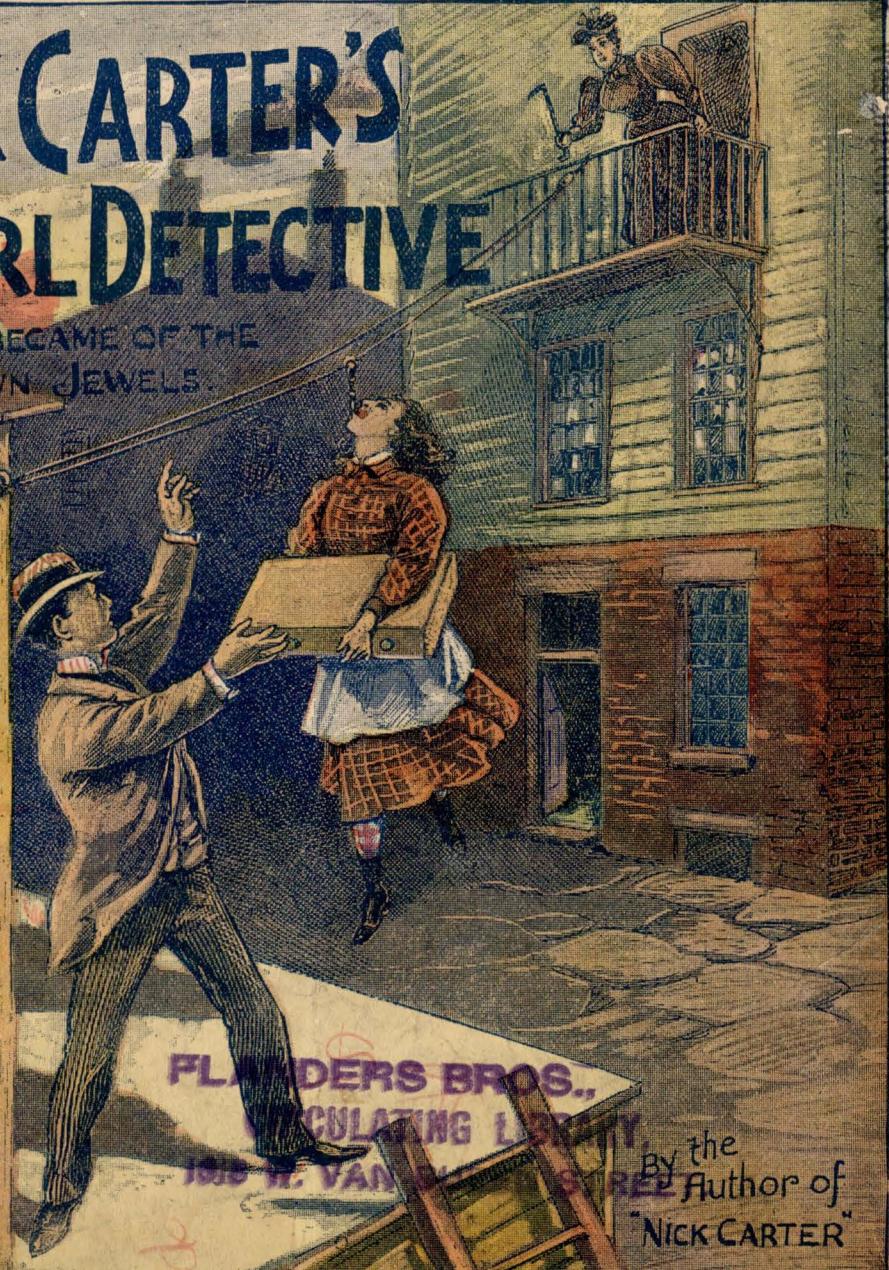
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III

NICK CARTER'S GIRL DETECTIVE

OR, WHAT BECAME OF THE
CROWN JEWELS.



By the
Author of
"NICK CARTER"

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NICK CARTER'S GIRL DETECTIVE; OR, WHAT BECAME OF THE CROWN JEWELS.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

THE CARRIER DOVE.

“Slug him!”

“Gimme another stone, Jimmy!”

“Hi! you hit his wing that time.”

“Wait till I get my slungshot.”

Half a dozen ragged boys were the ac-
tions in one of those characteristic street
nes that make the tenement district of
w York city famous for constant vari-
and animation, day and night.

A rickety old block of frame buildings
it had hived the poorest classes of the
tropolis for well on to half a century
s in progress of demolition, and the
most dormered corner of its un-
nched end was the centre of interest for
nob of eager urchins.

Circling about it, fluttering against the
sed shutters, beating its wings along
e line of little attic windows, was a
ow-white pigeon.

The idle, loitering crowd below had
served it, and with the clamor and zest
ubited in chasing some incautious rat,
d started in to bring it down, just for
e love of “pegging at something.”

There was plenty of ammunition in
e debris-littered street and free range
marksman, for nearly every un-

protected pane of glass in the old bar-
racks had already been smashed out.

A hot fusilade rained aloft. A stone
chip skinned the wing of the bird.

It fluttered down a yard or two, and
then, apparently exhausted, clung with
its feet to the top of a loose clapboard.

Renewed shouts greeted this partial
success in disabling the frightened bird.

A boy came running up with a slung-
shot, another with an air gun.

“Pop him over!”

Rat-tat-bang.

“Here! What are you up to?”

The sharp challenge instantly fixed the
attention of every marksman on the
speaker.

“Who are you?” blurted out half a
score of pugnacious voices, while as many
eyes sized up a strong-faced and strong-
limbed young fellow, whose poise, tone
and steady return glance told that he was
not to be trifled with.

If this individual had cared to be con-
fidential, he would have informed the
crowd that he was Jack Burton, a pupil
in Nick Carter's famous detective school.

As, however, he was simply a chance
stroller by the spot, acting the part of
any impulsive fellow too big-hearted to
see even the natural rights of a pigeon in-

vaded in this vandal-like manner, he answered effectively:

"The worst kind of a scrapper, when I get mad."

"Oho!"

"And don't you make me hot tormenting that poor, dumb creature any further."

"Yah! Give him a dose!"

"Try it. How's that? And that? Now fly, you young blackbirds! or I'll have a special from the humane society down on you in a twinkling."

Jack Burton knocked two frowsy heads together belonging to a belligerent duo who showed fight, and sent three others spinning who were stooping for missiles.

These made off promptly, but half a dozen others massed at a sullen, stubborn stand.

"You don't own the pigeon!" mumbled their disgruntled spokesman.

"Do you?"

"Much as anybody."

"Then give it a square chance. If you can get it without harming it that's fair play, but batter and bang and mutilate it you won't, for I shan't let you."

The dove took a brief flight just here. It essayed to reach the roof, failed, and fluttered in between two cornice blocks, only the tips of some white feathers showing.

Like an ostrich sticking its frightened head out of view, it presented a tempting pose for a spry climber.

Such a one instantly darted from the group—a supple young urchin who seemed built on wires.

He made a jump for a corner water-spout. Then up it, agile as a monkey, he clambered aloft.

Two feet from the half hidden dove, just about to stretch out his hand to seize it, a disappointed chorus went up from the engrossed watchers below.

The pigeon skimmed his touch. It got to the roof, swayed at a shingle edge and then went over it out of view.

"That settles it!"

"You're no good!"

The urchin above made a grimace at his friend's derision, started to slip down the pipe, but, pausing, put out one hand.

It was to turn the slats of the nearest

shutters and take a curious look into the room beyond.

"Murder!"

In a yell, in a howl, the boy made the echoes ring.

He came down so fast that it was more like a tumble than a slide.

He landed all in a bunch, and with eyes blinking fearfully and a chalky pallor streaking his face where it was not grimed, bolted out:

"He's there!"

"Who's there?" demanded Jack, startled quite a little by the boy's frightened, breathless manner.

"Old Max, the miser!"

"Who's he?"

"The man who has lived up there for ten years, all alone with his pet pigeons."

"Thought he moved when the others did?" insinuated an outside voice.

"He's there, I tell you!"

"Suppose he is?"

The urchin's eyes dilated worse than ever.

"Sitting up straight as a poker!"

"Well?"

"That's why his pigeon can't get in."

"What is?"

"He's dead!"

A thrill went the rounds—Jack himself could feel it as if one of a magnetic circle.

"Stone dead!"

"See here, what are you talking about?"

Jack gave the parrot-voiced, incoherent youngster a shake and brought him face to face.

"You're rattled," he went on. "Now then, get your wits back. What's scared you?"

"I told you," chattered the urchin—"oh, how he stared! Saw him through the blinds. Guess I'm going daffy. I can see him now—everywhere. Ugh! I want to go home."

The speaker was unmistakably unnerved. He shivered and shrank.

The discovery, however, that sent his wits out of joint and struck his companions dumb, seemed to rally all Jack's animation and interest to a steady focus.

A tragedy, a mystery, stumbled over by others and producing fright or morbid

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curiosity only, was to him a signal call to duty.

He was not out looking for such, but he never let such pass him by without that same schooled attention that had made the eye, the nerve and the great humane heart of Nick Carter score up a mighty debt of gratitude and justice from those he had benefited.

A dead man in the lonely attic of a dismantled building—"old Max, the miser"—a white dove frantically beating its life out trying to get in to its dead master—why, here were all the elements of the biggest kind of a sensation!

All that was sentimental, however, gave instant place to the intensely practical in Jack's strong nature.

He had the record at Nick Carter's headquarters of being practically level-headed in cases of exigency—a pupil who never went to pieces, no matter how intense the strain of excitement.

"Here you—quick!" he called out sharply.

His keen eye had promptly searched out the coolest of the staring mob, and the selected one slouched forward.

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Want to earn a quarter?"

"Do I!"

Jack drew out a card—one of his own.

He hastily scrawled a message upon it.

"You know where the nearest police station is?" he inquired.

A little jeering quiver went the rounds. The urchin probably knew it, inside as well as outside, from occasional forced visits.

"Take this card there—for the lieutenant. It tells him to hurry back here. Come with him, and I'll pay you. I may want to ask you a few more questions about old Max, the miser."

The boy chanced to catch sight of the printed inscription the pasteboard bore.

He left a broken string of animated ejaculations in his trail as he bounded away, in which "Nick Carter!" falling upon the quick ears of his companions, seemed to go through them like a shock.

Sharp-witted Jack traced the influence of the name in the row of half-awed, wholly inquisitive eyes fixed upon him.

"No racket, now!" he spoke sternly. "There'll be rumpus enough here when

the police come. Don't go drawing a crowd."

"No, sir," piped ready voices—the discovery of Jack's identity had elevated him several degrees in the estimation of the unruly coterie.

"A kid fly-cop!" he heard murmured.

"And one of Nick Carter's!"

"He's the one I've heard about—the young Samson."

"Can break an iron bar with his fist!"

Jack would have smiled at these exaggerated comments, if he had not been entirely serious over the business in hand.

"Lively now, youngster!" he directed, nudging the late climber.

"Yes, sir!"

"How do I get up into that building? Oh, I see! Don't any of you come following."

The lower part of the tenement had been pretty well torn away.

A scaffolding ran across the front, an extension of the dismantling apparatus where men were at work at the other end of the building.

Jack scaled a stringer and crosspiece and crawled up on the staging, stepped through a sashless window, and found himself on the second floor of the place.

The stairs ascending to the third story echoed out his footsteps ominously hollow.

The thought that he was first on the scene of some unusual tragedy urged professional zeal ahead of all grawsome, morbid dread.

Jack's cursory study of the shuttered rooms outside enabled him to proceed straight to it.

It was a sort of projection of the building proper, and he had to go up two steps.

A door swung, and he stood in a dark little entry. Four more feet accomplished, and he turned the knob of a door which he felt sure belonged to the apartment into which the climber had peered.

It was caught on the inside, but as he rattled it Jack was sure only a frail staple hook or light safety catch opposed, and he bent all his force to remove the obstacle.

The door gave in very suddenly. Jack was projected forward with it.

Then a singular thing happened.

Plunging a head only lightly, he could have checked himself at once only for the presence of some grease on the floor.

His feet struck this, one went back like a ball, caught the door and sent it shut after him with a slam. The other other foot slipped also. In vain Jack sought to rally to a balance. He went ahead, stumbling half way across the room, fell over something and landed flat.

That was not all. In an instant he discerned a new element of risk and danger.

His breath was shut off as if a steel hand had gripped his windpipe.

His eyes smarted as if thrown full of cayenne pepper, and he sucked in air that scalded as if charged with ammonia.

"Charcoal-sulphur!" he choked. "Where's the door? Why, this is serious!"

Serious? It was tragic! Such a sense of deserting sensation Jack had never experienced before.

The densest fumes hovered in the air. The room was dark, his ideas of location confused.

He came up against the wall, groped, found no door, stumbled, and every limb sank inert as under some dread paralysis.

In a void, gasping way Jack looked aloft where the little row of attic windows were set solid in the woodwork.

There only light came in, all other windows were shuttered, and there, in a vague, dull way, he fancied a sound echoed.

A tapping, swishing contact struck his dull, fading sense of hearing.

A creaking pressure ended in a sudden, violent crash.

Splinters of thin glass rained down. They struck the floor behind him in a rattling riot.

He felt the air lift as if it was a pall. The vent given, it rushed upward with the force of a fire-damp current set loose.

Still painfully panting, Jack stared as a fluttering something went spinning around his head.

"The pigeon!" he panted.

The dove had broken in the frail window overhead, and had found a way to its dead master at last.

He felt it strike his arm, he heard it

thud to the floor, overcome by the charred coal fumes.

These were clearing rapidly. Jack staggered like a drunken man as he made for a window, tracing it by a few penetrating streaks of light coming through the chinks of the slats the climber outside had opened.

He almost fell across the sill as he threw up the sash.

The shutters were held by an old-fashioned iron catch.

Jack snapped this loose, letting in a blinding light.

A slight murmur reached his ears from below. An interested coterie of spectators, the juvenile crowd he had left there awe-eyed, stood looking up, transfixed like a group of statues.

Jack turned to take the room within his glance.

A startling sight greeted him.

In a chair beside which was a little charcoal stove sat an old, grizzled man.

"The boy was right! He is dead—of stone dead!" murmured Jack.

The cause was easy to trace—a cause that had more recently very nearly given the young detective also his quietus.

The dead man looked as if he had been weak and sickly in life.

The small pipe of the charcoal stove ran to the chimney, but in some way this had slipped out.

The covering cap had at once fallen into place, blocking any chimney draught, while the pipe had poured out its deadly fumes unchecked.

Asleep when this occurred or too weak to remedy the accident, old Max, the miser, had met his death.

"I did right in sending for the police," soliloquized Jack. "A case for the coroner, purely."

His mission was ended, so far as detective service was concerned.

There was no mystery here—a plain case of suicide or accidental death.

"Hold on!"

Just about to leave the room, Jack noticed again the white pigeon.

It lay exactly at its master's feet. Its flutterings were past, and as he picked it up quite pityingly, its head fell sideways.

Persecution, exhaustion, the charcoal

the by the cha fumes had extinguished its tiny spark of life.

ly. Jack sta as he made f a few penc through the limber outsid the sill as h d by an old letting in ai his ears from arie of specta had left there up, transfixe e room within him. h was a little rizzled man. He is dead— ck. trace—a cause nearly given quietus. f he had been charcoal stove in some way t once fallen unney draught, out its deadly d or too weak old Max, the t the police," ase for the o far as detec here—a plain death.

room, Jack on. er's feet. Its he picked it of fell sideways. These were in clear, eligible script. The balance was a queer, motley jumble of crosses, figures and inverted capital letters.

"A cypher message," murmured Jack.

"Poor thing!" commented Jack. "It must have been one of the old man's pets."

It was a beautiful specimen of its kind, and he stroked its soiled plumage softly.

"Why, it's a carrier dove!" exclaimed Jack the next moment.

He guessed this from the fact that his moving fingers had met a little narrow silken ribbon crossing its back feathers.

Tracing up the harness-like bands, Jack turned the bird over in his hand.

"Hello!" he breathed, very curiously, and with a decided start of interest—"it's got a message, a folded note, tied under one of its wings!"

CHAPTER II.

ROXY, THE FLOWER GIRL.

Instantly every sense of Nick Carter's young protegee was on the keenest alert.

The discovery of a carrier dove was not of itself an every day occurrence.

To find one dead, unmistakably bearing a message for its dead master, was an event too novel and suggestive to be passed lightly by.

"The old man's pigeons were something more than pets," soliloquized Jack, convincingly. "A recluse, a miser, running a carrier dove line! there's something very mysterious, worth the looking at in this, I'm thinking."

There was a note to look at, doubled over and over and over into the smallest possible compass.

Jack curiously removed it from under the pigeon's wing, opened it, inspected it with eagerness.

"What's this!" He read the dainty lines written in a close, feminine hand, with an air of mingled distrust and perplexity.

His eyes grew more startled and wondering as he took a second perusal.

There were two names in the note, plainly written:

"Nick Carter."

"The Duke of Corva."

These were in clear, eligible script. The balance was a queer, motley jumble of crosses, figures and inverted capital letters.

"A little study at that, and Nick Carter will have it clear as noonday. He needs to, if I'm any judge! His name! The Duke of Corva's name! Why! is this sheer luck, or a trick of coincidence, for the very case I'm working on—or rather blundering blindly on so far—is the case of the Duke of Corva."

The case of the Duke of Corva had come up in Nick Carter's detective school not three hours since.

The veteran detective had called Jack into his library that morning, and had given him a memorandum and a photograph.

It seemed that at several social functions recently held at the home of General Rodney Muir, the leader of a swell Fifth avenue set, one or more of the guests had been robbed.

A lady's diamond earrings, the well filled wallet of a too-convivial brcker, the repeater of a young society bud—these had mysteriously changed hands during an evening's entertainment.

So exclusive was the set and so numerous these thefts that the general, for whom Nick in his active days had done some very effective work among swindling Indian agents, had visited the veteran detective, begging of him to attempt in a quiet way to unearth the mystery of the robberies.

The crowning climax in these the general had reported that morning.

An honored guest of the set, en route for his palatial home in Spain, the Duke of Corva, had been the last sufferer.

A magnificent solitaire stud had been stolen from him, he claimed.

The duke had begged that no note be taken of it, but the general had insisted on replacing it.

He brought a photograph of the duke, and requested that whoever he detailed to work on the case should watch its original closely, as he wore a great many more valuable gems, and he feared the thief or thieves would make him a special mark for their peculations.

He felt that as a guest and a stranger in the city the duke was his especial charge, and hoped to evade any further annoyance or loss for his distinguished friend.

Jack got his bearings on the case, and

matured his plans to be present at that evening's function at the Muir mansion, where he intended to assume the role of the young society detective.

He was on his way to the Waldorf, where the duke had an elegant suite of rooms, intent on getting a casual look at him, when the episode of the pigeon had transpired.

"Bolted right up against a mystery at the start!" muttered Jack in a puzzled way. "Nick Carter's name and the Duke of Corva's name on the message found under that dove's wing! What can it, what can this wretched, half-starved old miser have in common with General Rodney Muir's distinguished guest?"

Jack never wasted time on idle surmise. He saw his next move plainly; to figure out the balance of the cypher letter and get the connection.

He had just placed the note in his pocket, when the sounds of excited voices and hurried footsteps proclaimed the arrival of the police.

In five minutes the officers had the details of the case embodied in a report.

"Found dead—the cause escaping charcoal fumes," was the gist of their investigations.

Jack said nothing about the message found under the dead dove's wing.

He, however, questioned closely the urchin to when he paid the promised quarter, as to the miser's habits and friends.

"Just lived here all alone by himself—never had any friends," the youngster insisted.

The police ransacked the place all over, but no trace of old Max's accredited wealth was brought to light.

In a closet with a barred window were found half a dozen other pigeons.

The bars were of wood, and the officer broke them out.

The doves, however, did not seem inclined to depart at once, so he closed the door, leaving them to their own devices.

Jack left the building alone. When he came to the long scaffolding, he observed that at its other end a ladder afforded easy access to the ground.

A sight of the crowd of urchins, acting as if they intended to give him an ova-

tion, decided him on slipping away unseen.

He passed down the bending, rickety platform and had nearly got to its end when he waited at a supporting string to give some one else an opportunity to pass over the intervening boards so not to put too much weight on the planks.

The "some one else" was a girl about fifteen.

At a glance, citybred Jack took her as one of those poor flower girls who earn a precarious living selling little bouquets.

She was exceptionally neat in her dress, patched and skimped though it was, and her bright, saucy face showed that hard knocks with the world had made a keen little business woman of her.

"Come across—don't be afraid," directed Jack.

"Afraid!"

The girl danced over the bending boards as fearlessly as if skipping a rope.

"Buy a bouquet?" she smiled, coaxingly.

"You take a queer place to sell your wares," commented Jack—"thirty feet above the street."

"Oh! I heard something was up in the old rookery—wanted to find out what and so took this short cut."

"Yes, some one suffocated by charred fumes."

"We used to live there."

"Take care!"

A piercing yell accompanied the words from above.

Jack gave one quick, upward glance.

"Look out!" he cried, and instantaneously grabbed the girl toward him.

Her basket of flowers went hurtling down from the violence of the motion.

"What is it?" she struggled vaguely. A terrific clatter was her answer.

Not five feet away, with a horrific shock there came bolting squarely down upon the scaffolding a chimney.

It went through the planks as if they were paper, splintered the base support and tearing the entire scaffolding structure loose sent it tilting over into the street.

Jack instantly discerned that he was

ng away una position where strength would count less than agility.

ling, ricket To follow out with the framework to its end would be tempting a swinging fall, to go tting stringed down among a shower of bricks and opportunity boards would be to sink crushed into a boards so a pit of debris.

ght on the No window was near. The only stay-
ing prop at hand was an iron stanchion
s a girl ocoming a foot or two out from the build-
ing, which had at some time or other
took her in supported a sign board.

rls who earn Quick as thought Jack swung one
le bouquets, stalwart arm about the girl's waist.

eat in her Shooting out his other hand, he grasped
l though i at the stanchion just as the tottering
face showed scaffold wreck slipped away from under
world had their feet.

s woman of "Hold to me!" he directed his cling-
ing charge. "Don't get scared."

be afraid," "Never scared."

"That's good. I can hold on. That's
better."

he bending Jack was a trifle surprised at a prompt,
ping a rope intelligent movement on the part of his
miled, coax burden.

The girl had relieved him of supporting
her by reaching up, seizing the stanchion
herself, and sustaining her own weight.

"You're a good one!" commended Jack
enthusiastically.

"You're a better one," breathed the
girl promptly. "You saved my life before
you thought of your own."

"I stopped you, or you might have
been past the danger point. Hold on,
now, sis—"

"I'm not sis."

"Then miss."

"No, I'm Roxy."

"Then, Roxy, hold on!"

"I'm holding on."

"The stanchion is going. It won't,
with your weight alone—"

"Oh, that's it?" interrupted Roxy
vaguely. coolly. "You stick, I'll take care of my
answer. self."

a horrible "Stop! Stop!"

uarely down The startled Jack was too late to pre-
ey. vent a daring, a hair-raising act on the
as if they part of his plucky companion in peril.

use supports. With a clear glance over her shoulder,
olding struc and with perfect composure the flower
er into the girl made a swerve of her supple body

suggestive of the practice-poise of an ex-

at he was ipert gymnast.

She gave a light spring. Jack's flesh crawled as he saw the risk she was taking.

A rope ran from the roof to a derrick post near the ground.

For this Roxy aimed, and this Roxy struck.

She took a graceful swing, allowed both hands to slide like pulleys, and reached the point where the rope was tied to the derrick.

In a flashing second she had it untied, in another she was swinging across the denuded sidewalk space.

Coming to a stand on top of a timber projecting from the debris pit, she swung the rope across Jack's support.

"Come down," she called up cheerily.

Jack landed at her side. He was a little breathless, but his eyes glowed with admiration.

"Roxy," he said appreciatively, "you've got two things that make you a jewel."

"Have I?"

"You have."

"What are they?"

"First, the pluck of a boy."

"Oh! all boys are not plucky."

"And sense—good, sober sense."

Roxy's lips puckered to a trifling pout.

"Cents I haven't got, and that's going to be the trouble!" she remarked, half archly.

She gave a rather dismal look at the heap of debris where her basket of flowers had been engulfed.

Jack understood her glance. His generous hand went instantly to his pocket.

"Oh, that trifle?" he remarked lightly.
"I'll fix that. You'll have to buy a new stock. Take it, Roxy."

The flower girl put her hands behind her.

"I don't take charity," she remarked, with a look that made Jack flush up as if he had offended a high-born society lady.

"You will a loan from me."

"I won't a loan—not even from you!" retorted Roxy, good-naturedly, "and I think you're the very best boy gentleman I ever met."

"'Boy gentleman' is rather dubious, but it's new!" laughed Jack. "Well, you're worth meeting, anyway. A girl that don't faint and screech, and knows

how to use the wits Nature give everybody if they only employ them rightly, is a novelty. You struck that rope as if a jump for life was an every-day exercise with you."

"Pretty much."

"What's that?"

"I say, pretty near. My folks tried to train me for the 'infant wonder' once. Look here."

Roxy drew out a little device Jack recognized as a copy of the ones used by gymnasts who hook it to a rope, and, inserting a mouthpiece, cling, swing and hold on by sheer strength of the teeth.

"Oh, 'woman-with-the-iron-jaw' act?" he commented.

"They used to punish me by making me hang on the clothes line with that sixty seconds," explained Roxy. "Good-bye. I'm going home."

"I'm going with you," spoke Jack, determinedly.

"You ain't!"

"I am! How are you going to get a new flower outfit?"

"My aunt will have to fix that some way."

"I'm going to see your aunt, then, and loan her what you're too proud to take," declared Jack. "See here, Roxy, we were chums up aloft there when things looked black—we'll be friendly below here, or it will be your fault. I know what it is to have to earn your living on no capital, and I'm going to help that aunt of yours out, if I have to shadow you all over New York city to do it!"

"Come ahead, then," spoke Roxy, with sudden determination. "You're a positive one!"

Jack was immensely interested in the girl.

Like Nick Carter, the exhibition of any marked characteristic always interested and charmed him.

This girl had splendid nerve—the nerve that is never braggart, but always to be relied on.

Another thing, she had said that she had formerly lived in the old barracks just being torn down.

It would, therefore, probably be very greatly worth Jack's while to question a person practically "on the spot" regarding the dead man he had just visited.

"Roxy," he said, as they entered narrow, quiet street, "I want to ask you a few questions."

"All right."

"You said you used to live in the tenement block yonder?"

"For two years."

"Did you know Max, the miser?"

"Everybody knows him. We lived in the tenement right below."

"You and your folks?"

"Yes, my aunt and my uncle, and say! you'd better leave me now."

Roxy had halted sharply. Jack regarded her with some wonder.

"What now, Roxy?" he projected.

"Go back, that's what."

"Why?"

"Because there he is!"

She pointed at the foremost of three hard looking men who, half-intoxicated were stumbling out of a squalid grogery

"There who is?" interrogated Jack.

"My uncle."

"Well, what of it?"

"He's seen me, that of it, and from the way he looks and the way I feel," announced Roxy, her lips coming grimly tight shut as if she was full of fight and mettle, "there's going to be the biggest kind of a row!"

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING "TIP."

Roxy did not look the least bit frightened as the leader of the three approaching tipplers hurried his steps toward her.

"Hi!" he hailed, with an exultant arm-swing toward his companions "here's luck—Roxy herself."

"You won't find it luck if you come too near," remarked the flower girl.

She had backed to an ash barrel. Its loose board cover and a broomstick behind it seemed to suggest some kind of security, for she gave her demonstrative relative a look that rather daunted, for somewhat checked him.

"Come on, fellers!" he sang out, rallying a support he evidently felt he needed.

"What do you want?" demanded Roxy, coolly.

"I want you. See here, gal, who your natural purtector?"

"You ain't, that's sure!"

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"Ain't? We'll see. I just got back from the Island, and I just gave your precious aunt the mauling of her life for swearing me into a two months' sentence."

"That's the way you usually celebrate."

"She didn't have a sou, so I've been looking for you. Where's your flowers?"

"Lost them."

"Tain't so! You saw me coming and hid them. Come, gal—save broken bones and turn over your morning's earnings. As I say, I'm your natural purtector, and I demand the rights the law gives me."

"You want money?"

"I'm dry as a fish, and I've got to have money. You've hit it. Fork over."

"Then I'm glad I lost my flowers, I'm glad I haven't got a cent! Rave, howl, tear, you wretched miscreant! but you'll go dry this time, for all of me."

"If I had a gal talk that way to me——" put in one of the uncle's tipsy companions.

"I'd lam her!" completed the second.

"Lam her?" roared the indignant "protector." "Why, what's put this new nerve into her? You won't give your uncle the necessities of life, eh? Gal, I'm going to give you such a reminder of you're natural duty as'll stay with you the rest of your life!"

The burly loafer made a grab for a stick lying at the gutter.

Roxy had not stirred an inch. She stood like a statue, but there was a vivid spark of warning menace in either clear, nervy eye.

About to make a rush upon her, the irate uncle came squarely up against an intervening form.

"That'll do," spoke Jack Burton, promptly.

"Eh? hey! What's this?"

"Put down that stick."

"Yes, on the gal's back!"

"Not just now you won't."

"What's that?"

"You'll not strike this young lady while I'm by."

"W-what! Boys! Hold me! Catch me, I'm a-swooning. 'Young lady'—oh, my!"

Two pink spots in Roxy's cheeks told

how her quick nature responded to Jack's magnificent compliment.

Jack gave the burly jiber a push backward.

The man uttered a cry like the sullen roar of an incensed monster fierce for blood.

"Why! I'll just crack the audacious kid into little bits!" he promised his companions.

He grated his teeth and he made a forward rush, his brawny fists raised like sledgehammers.

Jaak Burton was called "the young Samson of Nick Carter's detective school."

He never proved his claim to the title so completely as at the present moment.

His bunched fingers revolved like Indian clubs as he made one dexterous bob.

Two smacks took his brawny opponent in the face.

One knocked his head sideways, the other tilted it back with a snap.

"I've swallowed 'em!" yauped the astonished fellow, ejecting what was left of two teeth. "Oh, it's going to be murder now!"

He made a second forward dive.

"Grab the gal, you two!" he directed. "She'll run and hide if you don't. Soon as I finish up this fellow—waow! Ugh! Help!"

Jack Burton had changed his tactics. The sight of the loafer's two cronies making for Roxy told him that he must use dispatch if he hoped to champion her cause in a new onslaught.

He massed all the strength and dexterity he had acquired from proficient practice in Nick Carter's gymnasium.

For half a minute that piece of sidewalk seemed the performing platform of a young cyclone just set loose.

Then the man who was hankering for blood sat down in a pool of it, swaying in a dazed, astonished way as if lightning had struck him and he was just finding it out.

"I'm with you, Roxy!" called out Jack, preparing for a new spurt.

"No need," came the tranquil response.

"Whew!"

Jack stood spellbound.

Roxy was "cleaning out" her opposing enemies in a way that showed less of unmaidenly grit than the resolute spirit of a girl who "would not be sat on" by anybody.

One of her assailants tried to make a grab for her.

Up came the board top of the ash barrel.

Down came the top of the ash barrel.

With a frightful howl the venturesome ruffian went reeling back, as the board met the top of his hard skull and split right in two with a double snap.

The other saw his comrade's fate, and tried to divert his own onward rush.

As he swerved, Roxy grabbed up the broomstick handle.

Whack!

Just once it struck the crazy bone of the fellow's elbow.

He let out a scream of mortal pain that rang like a tug whistle.

He never stopped running, however, and, putting after him with an affrighted look back at Roxy, the other man sprinted off under an impulse of dread that infused sudden sober strides into his limbs.

"What's this, now?"

The row and racket had attracted a police officer, who came hastening up to the spot.

"Do you want to give him in charge?" inquired Jack.

"He's the torment of our lives at home," said Roxy.

Jack whispered a few words to the officer.

Roxy looked curious and suspicious at Jack's ready influence over him, for the policeman dragged his prisoner away as if the chief of the service had given him a command.

"Well, that was rather a hot one," commented Jack, trying to tuck in a flapping rip in his coat he had received in the encounter.

Roxy was not responsive. She stood eyeing Jack a little shadily.

"See here," she spoke, "who are you, anyway?"

"Me?" projected her smiling champion—"I'm Jack."

"Jack who?"

"Burton."

"You—you seemed to know that office pretty well," insinuated Roxy.

"Not at all. Never saw him before."

"He did just what you told him to do, as if you had a right to order him."

"Oh, no. Only professional courtesy."

Roxy looked puzzled, but still suspicious.

"What's that?" she questioned.

"Why, we're sort of in the same line."

The flower girl's pretty face clouded.

"I do hope you're not a detective!"

"Why so?"

"Fellows who sit around the station just hungry to pounce down on poor unfortunate!"

"Ever trouble you?"

"No."

"Nor any one else who don't deserve it. But I'm not a station detective, Roxy."

"Are you any kind?"

"I am, Roxy. To be candid, I'm a pupil in Nick Carter's detective school."

"Oh, say!"

Roxy's eyes brightened up like magic sunshine.

"Say it."

"I know him!"

"Nick Carter?"

"Yes. He's bought many a bouquet of me, and he's said many a pleasant word, and I don't wonder you're smart and strong and a gentleman, if you belong to him."

"A boy gentleman," though. Thank you, Roxy."

Jack made a sad bungle of adjusting his torn coat so the flapping tear would not show.

"Guess I'll have to go home for repairs," he remarked.

"Oh, no," demurred ready-witted Roxy. "I'll fix that."

Roxy filled her pretty mouth with pins she carried to affix bouquets.

"Now, stand still," she directed, posting Jack on the ash barrel and half-kneeling at his side.

She began to trimly lay over the edge of the rip in the coat.

It was a long one, and required some dexterity for manipulation.

"I can't get the pins through," she declared. "You've got something in your inside pocket."

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"All right. I'll remove the obstacle," accommodated Jack.

He drew out some letters, Nick Carter's memoranda on the Muir case and the Duke of Corva's photograph among them.

The latter slipped his fingers and landed face down on the sidewalk.

Roxy, completing her task, neatly picked it up to hand to him.

"Some real young lady, I suppose?" she smiled, roguishly, tendering the card.

"I don't know any more real, genuine young lady than you," declared Jack, with emphasis. "Take a look if you want to."

"Why!"

Roxy inspected the picture with a start of surprise.

Then her lips twitched very soberly, and her eyes took their old suspicious tinge as she said:

"A friend of yours?"

"Not at all. Why?" inquired Jack, curiously.

"Oh! I know him, that's all," answered Roxy, and her serious face told the observant Jack that she did not place the original of the photograph in a very favorable category.

"Oh, I guess not!" observed Jack.

"Yes, I do."

"Fancied resemblance—I don't think you know this gentleman."

"Gentleman!"

Roxy's superb scorn flashed up again.

"Well, nobleman, then, if that suits you better."

"Who is?"

"The original of that picture."

"Are you joshing me?"

"I respect you too much not to be dead level with you on everything, Roxy," affirmed Jack, gallantly. "He's that. That's a picture of the high, royal Duke of Corva."

Roxy gave Jack a look that made him think there might be a mistake, after all.

"Duke nothing!" she blurted forcibly. "It's plain, mean-hearted, Crooked Tip Barrows."

"It's what!" shouted Jack, in something of horror at the girl's cool way of pulling General Rodney Muir's distinguished friend down into the common every-day dust of the slums.

"I told you."

"You couldn't be mistaken, Roxy?"

"Oh, never!" cried Roxy, with a sudden flash of anger in her bright eyes—"no, never!"

"You know him?"

"I guess I do! Do you see that?"

Roxy pulled down the neat lace collar about her neck, and showed the scar of what must have once been a cruel welt.

"Yes, Roxy, I see it."

"A riding whip made that—a riding whip in the hand of Crooked Tip Barrows."

"How was it, Roxy?"

"He came prancing up to the tenements about two months ago, large as life, all togged up in crack horsing club clothes."

"This man?" spoke Jack, pointing to the photograph.

"That man, your man, the same man—don't I tell you so?" insisted the flower girl, with spirit. "I had known him when a whole hostler's suit was his Sunday best, and I spoke to him and asked him to buy a bouquet."

"And he struck you?"

"Like the low coward he was, mad because I'd hailed him as the old, good-for-nothing, tank Bowery actor, Tip. Oh, it was lucky for him he skipped the rock I threw, for there was hot temper behind it, I tell you!"

"And you've not seen him since, Roxy?"

"I've been looking!" answered Roxy, her little hands closed very tight.

"Roxy, you've put a flea in my ear."

The flower girl looked up quickly.

"Why, are you looking for him?"

"In a way, yes."

"In the detective way?"

"Well, partly."

"Good! See here, Jack Burton, you only half believe me."

"I—that is, we're all liable to mistakes."

"I'm not—on that man particularly."

Jack Burton looked thoughtful.

Roxy's positive recognition of General Muir's Duke of Corva as plain Crooked Tip Barrows had staggered him.

Stranger things than that were happening every day.

A key to the mysterious robberies go-

ing on in the Fifth avenue swell set was what Nick Carter's young detective was looking for.

Had Roxy, the flower girl, furnished it?

"Roxy," said Jack, definitely, "a few minutes ago you wouldn't let me loan you the price of a new flower outfit."

"Well, Jack?"

"Do you want to earn it?"

"How?"

"Plainly; helping me do a little detective work."

The girl looked flustered.

"Jack, you—scare me!" she confessed.

"I don't see how?"

"It takes smart people to do that."

"That's why I want you to help me."

"Oh, come now!"

"And you're smarter than a steel trap—the right kind of smartness, too; all business, no nonsense, just a natural, gritty girl with a living to earn and honest enough to be faithful and diligent."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"I want you to hunt down this Crooked Tip."

Roxy's face became all animation.

"Why!" she exclaimed, "I'll do that for nothing."

"We don't want that. It's worth something to us, and we propose to pay for it."

"All right."

"There's two dollars, and there's my card."

Roxy took the money with reluctance, but glanced at the card studiously.

"Call that two days' work looking for your man," explained Jack.

"And report to you?"

"If you find Crooked Tip, yes."

"Find him!" spoke Roxy, doughtily. "I'll run him to earth inside of twenty-four hours, or I'll give you back your money."

"You'll do it, if it can be done, I'm sure of that," encouraged Nick Carter's young detective.

"It will be done," settled the flower girl, with resolution; "and one thing more, Jack."

"Well, Roxy?"

"When I do run him down, you'll find that Crooked Tip Barrows and your high,

royal Duke of Corva are one and the same person!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CROWN JEWELS OF BOKHARA.

"Nail your man."

Jack Burton, the athletic young detective, read the brief message interestedly.

It was from Nick Carter, and Jack gave an acquiescent nod of the head that was like a bulging

"Quite right," he commented, with emphasis.

Jack stood in a little snugger just off one of the drawing-rooms of the elegant Muir poker mansion.

He was resting—resting from the hardest piece of character acting he had ever attempted.

His best friend, coming face to face with the monocled, brow-pasted, flabby-mouthed, vacant-eyed noodle who posed as the son of a famous oil king worth his millions, would have failed to recognize him under the clever assumption one single trace of sturdy, handsome-featured Jack Burton.

General Muir had helped him through the evening, for he was in the secret.

He had introduced Jack to his guests, he had particularly commended him to the good attentions of his friend, the Duke of Corva.

The minute the young detective had spoken ten words with this accredited sprig of Spanish nobility, he fancied he saw through his thin veneer of audacity aided by a brief stage education.

From that minute Jack set himself at work to ingratiate himself into the duke's good opinions, while watching his every movement.

The duke had feigned the part of one of those brisk, electric fellows who magnetize the inexperienced and dazzle the incautious.

He was all fuss, spirit and dash—here, there, everywhere—with a fondness for cornering his male friends in dimly lit ante-rooms to tell the latest story, and securing a tete-a-tete with marriageable young ladies in the shadowy veranda.

When eagle-eyed Jack saw one of these episodes terminate in a pretended fall by the duke, and the discovery of the loss of a breastpin on the part of the duke's com-

panion immediately afterward, he felt that Roxy, the flower girl, had given him a pointer that was worth something.

In ten minutes he had slyly slipped his hand into a favorite pocket of the duke.

It came out with the missing piece of jewelry.

That settled Jack's mind. He made one more test.

He had been very confidential with the duke, among other things had shown him a bulging pocketbook.

He had noticed the duke's eyes sparkle as he told him that he hoped to find somebody willing to have a private game of poker, limit ten thousand dollars, after the party was over.

Later, he managed it so that the duke came upon him in a stray corner.

Jack played the drink-stupefied nonentity to perfection.

The duke was all attentions, but when he left Jack he took the fat wallet with him—stuffed with paper.

Now, as Jack stood reviewing the case and deciding how he would act to cut short the career of the gay dreamer with so many castles in Spain, a note had been handed him.

It said succinctly, "Nail your man." It was signed "Nick Carter."

Jack instantly guessed what had occurred.

Nick had been half the afternoon studying out the cipher letter which Jack had found under the dead dove's wing.

"He's made it out, and it verifies the suspicion I imparted to him, before coming here, that the Duke of Corva is an impostor," reflected Jack, correctly.

Jack knew he was right as he turned over the little slip.

"Something else written here? Ah! a translation of the cipher letter. As I thought!" murmured Jack.

"Received consignment. Have written our Duke of Corva that if Nick Carter is to be called in to investigate, he had better draw out of action after one big haul."

"That's plain English," soliloquized Jack. "This alleged duke is part of a crowd in which dead Max, the miser, and his lady correspondent via the carrier dove route were partners. Clever people! They've taken no risks planting the

stolen stuff in the city. Max received and shipped it—where? I wonder where the other end of the pigeon air line is?"

Jack pocketed the slip of paper and put aside all present speculations.

He started out to find General Muir, and came across him in the library alone.

"General," he spoke, in a low, guarded tone of voice, "I have found the thief."

The general looked startled. The occurrence of two additional thefts that evening had mystified and annoyed him more than ever.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, eagerly, "that is famous!"

"The thief is still in the house."

"One of the servants?"

"No."

"A guest!—surely, not a guest?"

"Yes, and one of your most prominent ones."

"Incredible!"

"There is a pin, stolen, and by me secured from the thief's pocket."

The general looked aghast.

"I have allowed myself to be robbed of a dummy pocketbook."

"You are sure of the person?"

"Positive. An outside line, handled by others, has brought out some facts entirely verifying my own discoveries, and I have just received orders from Mr. Carter to 'nail my man.'"

"Who—who is he?" faltered the general.

"The Duke of Corva."

If Jack had struck the general a blow he could not have sent him more promptly to a chair, pale and overcome.

"The Duke of Corva!" gasped the general. "He just left me—"

"Not so loud," warned Jack, noticing a rustle of the near draperies. "Will you help me arrange the arrest quietly, or shall I publicly unmask him?"

"No, no—we must have no scandal!" choked the distressed general. "This is terrible—imposed on, robbed! Remain here. I will find this—this impudent scoundrel. Why, I shall be reprobated on every hand for introducing such a blackguard into New York society!"

"It's plain sailing now, I guess," mused Jack, pacing the room thoughtfully. "The man is no duke. Is he, then,

little Roxy's particular dislike, Crooked Tip Barrows? It will be a terrible let-down for these people. Well, general?"

"I cannot find him," reported General Muir, re-entering the room at that moment.

"You cannot find the duke?" echoed Jack, in some dismay.

"Nowhere."

"He has left the house?"

"No one has seen him do so."

"We must lose no time in action," spoke Jack, quickly. "He may have taken the alarm. He must not slip us."

Jack hurried to the servant in charge of the gentlemen's room.

"The duke's hat, cane, overcoat?" he projected.

"All here, sir."

"He is still in the house, then," murmured Jack, gliding down the hall and narrowly scanning every room in turn, the perturbed general keeping pace with him, and endeavoring as much as possible to hide his excitement from guests they met.

"I have not made him out," muttered General Muir.

"Nor, I," reported Jack.

"Then——"

"Try the verandas."

"I did."

"You may have missed him. Please be prompt, while I take a scurry below stairs. I know he was warned to drop out, but he can hardly know that he is discovered. He was to make one more big haul——"

"Eh? what's that?" exclaimed the general, startled.

"He had some big scoop in view."

"Great Heavens!"

A curdling shriek rang down the stairs.

"From my wife's boudoir!" cried General Muir, agitatedly.

"Murder!"

The vivid cry sent Jack up five steps of the velvet carpeted staircase.

"Thieves!"

He reached its top.

"Help!"

That last frantic, gasping shriek directed Jack to the right door.

He tore it open.

Upon the couch from which she had

apparently been disturbed, hysterically screaming, was a lady's maid.

The drawer of a beautifully inlaid cabinet lay at her feet.

"What's this?" demanded Jack imperatively.

"Oh! it's gone!"

"What is gone?"

"The crown jewels of Bokhara!"

CHAPTER V.

A CALL AT MIDNIGHT.

"The crown jewels of Bokhara?" repeated Jack, vaguely.

The title had a decidedly opulent sound. Jack felt that he was hobnobbing with some pretty formidable appendages of nobility in his brief society career.

"What is that?" cried General Muir, following him into the room at that instant.

Then, at a sight of the overturned drawer, at the suggestion of some missing object, he fell back with a groan.

"Wretched girl!" he voiced, bitterly. "You were told to watch!"

The maid buried her face in her hands and sobbed hysterically.

"Speak!" choked out the general. "How did this occur?"

"A guest."

"Yes! yes!"

"The duke."

"He was here?"

"An instant since. I awoke to find him at the drawer."

"And he went——" inquired Jack eagerly.

"Through that window."

"Why didn't you say so before?"

Jack sprang to where two long window opened from the centre into the room.

He glanced out upon a little veranda.

The side garden of the place faced him below, illuminated by the brilliant light from within.

Downstairs all was confusion now. The shriek had awakened all kinds of conjectures.

People were hurrying up the staircase in the general's wake, and the last one of the loiterers on the verandas was hastening indoors to catch the import of frightened, excited voices.

As if waiting for just that disappearance and a free field for flight, at the

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moment from under the balcony a form started to cross the garden.

"It's the duke!" breathed Jack, scarcely able to credit the rare good fortune of the discovery. "Halt, down there!" he called out, sharply.

The bareheaded figure paused and looked up keenly.

"Halt, you, Duke of Corva!"

The fugitive looked streetward beyond the iron fence, then back into the garden, as if calculating the chances of a run pursued by an outter.

"Halt, you, Crooked Tip Barrows!"

"Confusion!"

Jack's experiment had succeeded. The mention of that name started up the impostor like a spur.

A weapon in Jack's hand clicked, but the man below never faltered.

Across the yard he put. There was quite a high fence to scale.

It was too high to reach without a spring, but a dog kennel stood near it.

Jack was willing to give the fugitive a chance for his life, but he determined that he should not get over that fence un-winged.

"Let go!"

"Famous!"

The alleged duke, kicking out his foot vigorously, uttered the first cry.

Jack observed that the fugitive had in some mysterious, unaccountable manner been nabbed effectively, and gave voice to the second.

"One of the general's great Dane dogs—he keeps several," declared Jack. "It's my chance to get down!"

In frantic frenzy, the flying thief was wriggling, pulling, kicking.

His foot was held, however, by some unseen power inside the kennel as firmly as if handcuffed.

Jack leaped to the balustrade of the balcony.

He meditated a daring leap to the ground.

A thrill and an involuntary cry checked him, poising there.

"It's not a dog!"

He stared hard. In pulling away the fugitive thief was getting the best of it.

"It's—a girl!"

Out came a pair of arms—a swinging, battling, determined golden head.

"It's—Roxy!"

The flower girl had earned her two dollars—faithful, persistent Roxy had redeemed her pledge!

"Jack, quick! it's your man!"

Never letting go of a double grip of the duke's foot, the intrepid girl heeded not swinging slams or jolts.

"Let go, or I'll do you!" hissed her malevolent opponent.

"Never!"

"Roxy!"

As he recognizing her, as he seemed to trace in her desperate persistency a motive born of his cowardly whip cut, the miscreant bent and beat at the white, dodging face at his feet.

"Stop that, you coward!"

Jack was impelled to a leap at a sight of Roxy's peril.

He landed crashing in a great bush, struggled free, and started toward the kennel.

Upon the ground lay Roxy—poising to spring to kennel and fence was the fugitive.

He had got free. Jack hoped to reach him in time to prevent his dash for liberty.

Roxy anticipated him. She rose as if her prostrate pose was part of a preparatory ruse.

It was with a spring that carried her fairly, squarely across the man's shoulders.

Around his throat both arms were pressed.

He choked and reeled, trying to shake her off, but like a young tigress she clung.

Even hampered with her, he mounted the kennel, but slipped as he reached the fence.

"One minute more—I'm with you!" shouted Jack.

The fugitive uttered a roar of rage and desperation.

"Take it!" he yelled.

Jack Burton came up to the kennel in time to receive back into his arms the whirling, tottering figure of the flower girl.

"Roxy!" he gasped—"not hurt?"

"Oh, Jack—blinded!"

"The wretch!"

A minute lost in ardent pity; another in

placing the groping, writhing girl on the grass, and when Jack got to the fence the fugitive had disappeared.

He came back to Roxy. She was moaning softly.

"I thought I had him," she murmured, brokenly. "I traced him here, I shadowed him from the kennel. Jack, you believe me now—it is Crooked Tip?"

"Yes, yes—never mind, what has he done to you?"

"My eyes—I can't see."

"The miscreant—red pepper!"

Jack gathered up Roxy in his arms as if she was a child.

He carried her into the house and through the elegant drawing-rooms as if she were a princess claiming hospitality there by right.

Jack did not heed the torrent of questions rained upon him.

He placed Roxy on a couch in the reception-room.

"Fly!" he ordered to the gaping servant—"the best doctor you can find, and get him here the quickest you know how."

Jack hovered over the suffering girl with wetted bandages until the doctor arrived, impervious to even General Muir's amazed queries as to what it all meant.

"She's a plucky one!" commented the physician. "It's worse than sparks of fire, and she won't let out a cry. We'll have you comfortable in ten minutes, little one, and so you can see in twenty."

"And send her home in a carriage. Will you see to this, general?" inquired Jack, anxiously.

"She shall have every attention. Was she—"

"Helping me. She knows your duke thoroughly. Now, then, sir, what was taken up stairs?"

"The crown jewels of Bokhara."

"Were they valuable?"

Valuable! As General Muir began to describe a necklace no bigger than a child's string of beads, but holding black pearls, heart diamonds, double rubies, that were practically priceless, Jack decided that the Duke of Corva had been aiming for its abstraction all along.

He started at a mere hint of its enormous value, he credited much to the general's present excitement when he named

a sum for its recovery that would make its finder comparatively rich.

The general and his wife, it seemed, had a penchant for titled foreigners—that was their fad.

The exiled Prince of Bokhara had been their guest, and upon his royal gems had secured a liberal advance from the general.

"It is a trust, you see," explained General Muir. "It must be recovered."

"I shall get on its track without a moment's delay," promised Jack.

He started from the room—a quick voice hailed him.

"Jack!"

The young detective came back to Roxy's side. The physician had removed the particles of red pepper from her eye so she could see now.

"You needn't tell them to send me home," she whispered.

"Oh, yes! I must do that."

"I won't go!"

"Hello!" commented Jack—"pretty positive, Roxy?"

"I am. Twice that fellow, Crooke Tip, has had the best of it. He shan't the third time!"

"If the third time ever comes, Roxy."

"It will!" declared the flower girl with confidence. "I shall find Crooke Tip Barrows before morning!"

"She's a good one!" soliloquized Jack, as he left the place, "but I hope she runs no more risks. I can't wait to see that she don't, thought. Here's his work in hand."

Jack pressed the Muir carriage into service, as its owner had directed.

He went to the Waldorf first. Thick-alleged duke had not shown up.

Going to the telephone, he sent a signal to police headquarters to look out for and arrest the man he described.

He next called up Nick Carter's home and posting Aleck White, one of the pupils, at the 'phone, told him to hasten promptly to the Waldorf and place himself ready to nab the fugitive if he appeared.

Within two hours Jack had put out aild those collateral lines that are employed by the police when a man is "wanted."

"I don't rely on that much, though," he meditated. "It's personal work tha

that would make going to run down the stolen crown jewels of Bokhara."

wife, it seemed He dismissed the carriage at Nick Carter's door, which he finally reached.

foreigners—that khara had been over the merits of the case was what Jack lost craved.

royal gems had from the general "There's more than one end to the rest of this affair—there was the carrier dove and, even if I had got the duke," he declared. "Nick will take a clear look at all the points of the case, and start me right."

room—a quick Jack entered the library of the house to find the detective absent from home.

came back to Buff Hutchinson and Larry Moore, two other pupils, greeted him with interest as he entered the apartment.

an had removed "Aleck has gone, as you ordered," spoke up Larry.

or from her eyes "To the Waldorf?"

m to send me "Yes."

at." "I wish Mr. Carter—who's that?"

Jack—"pretty" "Maybe it's him."

ellow, Crooked "No, listen!"

He shan't tell. A violent ring had come at the door

comes, Roxy. "I can proceed to answer the summons in the flower girl's usual slow, methodical way.

ll find Crooked "The ring was sharply repeated.

ng!" "Hoity-toity—wake the sleepers!"

"I soliloquized, "rowled the servitor, who was a character on his way. "Well, what do you want?"

"but I hope I can't wait to "Jack!" pronounced a breathless voice.

nt. Here's how "Eh! you want Jack? Now, young

dy—"

carriage into "Don't you keep me waiting!" cried

irected. "I want operative and impatient tones. "I want

lorf first. Thack—Jack Burton. I've run a mile, and

n up. I'm all out of breath. It's a matter of life

he sent and death!"

ers to look out "Great goodness!" exclaimed Jack,

described. Bringing to his feet and running down

Carter's home hall. "It's Roxy!"

one of the "Yes, Jack, it's me."

I him to haster Demure enough, as she met Jack's

and place him. A glance fixed on her still red and

gitive if he apwollen eyes, was the flower girl.

" Didn't I tell you—" he began, in

had put out all ill censure.

are employed "To report progress."

is "wanted." "Eh? See here, Roxy, you're in no

uch, though, condition—"

onal work that "Just stop right there, Jack!" ordered

the imperative little lady. "Don't waste time. I've got him cornered."

"Who?" bolted out Jack, with a start.

"The man that got away with the crown jewels of Bokhara—Crooked Tip Barrows!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISER'S DEN.

Jack grabbed up his hat from the rack. "Come on!" he spoke hastily.

His two fellow pupils stared curiously at the midnight messenger who had power to stir up their comrade as they had rarely seen him excited before.

"Are those the same as you?" inquired Roxy, indicating Larry and Buff.

"Members of the detective school?—yes."

"Better bring them along."

"Why?"

"You may need help."

"Roxy, you don't mean to say that you've got the Duke of Corva?"

"I tell you there is no Duke of Corva."

"Well, then—Crooked Tip—"

"Cornered?"

"Yes."

"If you don't let any grass grow under your feet, I have. Didn't I just tell you so?"

Jack spoke a quick order to Larry and Buff.

Then he hurried to the door, descended the steps, and stood looking anxiously up and down the street.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Roxy, impatiently.

"A cab."

"Is that the detective way of it?"

"When a lady is in the case."

"Don't mind me. I can outrun the three of you, and I've had a sharp sprint already."

"Jack, she's a caution!" whispered Larry, into his comrade's ear, as he ran by his side, the girl in a steady lead.

"If by 'caution' you mean all that's bright, original and resolute, you've struck it right," declared Jack, with emphasis.

They were a queer coterie. A policeman they neared put out his club, but a word from Jack turned it back into an official salute.

A drunken trio took it for a foot race,

and applauded boisterously, but the quartet were soon out of range.

Jack was not at all sorry when Roxy let down her pace somewhat.

She rounded a corner, looked up, about her eagerly, and panted out:

"We're here!"

"Hello!" voiced Jack, quite as breathlessly.

He stared at the identical spot where that morning he had checked the attack on the carrier dove.

"There's your man," spoke Roxy.

She was pointing upward.

"Where?"

"In the room where old Max, the miser, died."

"See here, Rox——"

"Have I ever told you wrong?"

"No."

"Then, see there, Jack!"

"I can see a light through the shutter chinks, sure enough!"

"Of course, you can."

"And he's there?"

"I told you that, too. Why don't you do something instead of wasting time asking questions?"

Jack looked embarrassed as Buff chuckled, half audibly.

"I knew he'd put for these diggings," explained Roxy. "Don't a thief always make for what he knows best when in trouble?"

"Good logic, that," criticised Larry.

"Anyway, soon as the doctor got my eyes clear, I came here. It can't be half an hour since Crooked Tip went up a ladder——"

"What ladder?"

"He pulled it up after him."

"Go on," directed Jack.

"And I saw a light aloft right afterward. I don't know if he thinks he's safe to hide there, or even if he knows old Max is dead, but he's there."

"And you've outdone the whole police force of New York city!" commanded Jack, enthusiastically.

"I've earned the two dollars, I guess," smiled Roxy.

"Indeed, you have!"

"And I'll give it back just for the satisfaction of seeing the coward nabbed who struck me with his riding whip. I've been thinking since I saw you, Jack."

"About that fellow?"

"Yes. I remember now that he used to have a great deal to do with the old man. May be they were in cahoots—maybe he does know Max is dead, and is after the hoards."

"We're going to find out."

Jack made a move as if to go under the building and scale a bare joist.

"Don't do that—don't try it that way," advised Roxy.

"Why not?"

"Because I did, and Tip has barricaded the second story doorway so that one coming up can't help but turn something down, make a racket, it warn him. I'd wait for him if I you."

"He may be all night."

"Then he'll put the light out and go to sleep, and you might venture a climb then."

"But you don't understand, Rox," spoke Jack, with considerable anxiety. "You see, that man has come here for something definite. I want an opportunity to watch him and find out what."

"Oh, that's easy."

"Is it?"

"Yes, for me, and I guess a live climbing and risk won't faze you. I can get on the roof of the building across that alley there."

"And see into the attic windows?"

"Get right up to them, if you like."

"How?"

"Come with me, and I'll show you."

Jack held a brief consultation with Larry and Buff, directing them what points to watch and what to do if he came out of the place.

Then he allowed Roxy to pilot him where she would.

It occurred to Jack that for a novel Roxy was making some pretty practical suggestions—in fact, taking a decided lead in the affair on hand.

He soothed his professional pride, however, by telling himself that she knew all about their environment, and besides, or shown herself entirely worthy of confidence.

The neighborhood, including the occupied building across the alley, had been the only playground she ever knew.

she entered it and reached the roof in now that he used few moments. with the old man he traversed the roof to its alley cahoots—maybe Less than sixteen feet across the lead, and is after space, on a level line with them, e the sill of a closely shuttered window looking directly into the room of the out."

he roof took a queer inward cut just de it, showing an easy slant up which nt would not be difficult to the row of ll attic sashes.

I wish I was entirely sure Tip was in e, and knew what he was doing," arked Jack.

That's what we came here to find out, it?"

That's so." Then I'll soon tell you."

Roxy!"

ck shot out the word in a startled

e put out a hand, but the agile flower understand, Rox was too quick for him.

nsiderable anxiety large supply gas pipe ran directly has come here ss the alley from one building to the I want an oppo.

I find out what." long this without the least hesitancy,

ky had started, balancing herself with stretched hands as easily as if it was a five-inch plank.

Circus training, you know, Jack," whispered back smilingly.

ck held his breath till his venture companion had reached the opposite side of the chasm.

oxy's exploits were beginning to dazzle him. This spry, independent girl was using a spirit into detective methods which constantly awakened his most ardent admiration.

he stepped on the sill of the window lightly touched the shutters.

Stuck fast—she can't open the slats,"

ulated Jack. The flower girl did not allow this to taking a decent her. She was up the slant of the and.

essional pride, lying flat, she peered down through If that she knew narrow attic sashes.

ent, and besides, or the space of fully two minutes ly worthy of coe was silence and lack of motion.

hen Roxy slid back, and came tripping over the pipe with an audacious cross the alley, chalance that made Jack's head whirl. und she ever knI wouldn't try that if there wasn't

bright moonlight," she vouchsafed. "I've done it many times on that same pipe, when they wanted to make me the 'infant prodigy.' "

"You're the girl prodigy, and no mistake!" declared Jack.

"That's all right. Glad I'm able to make some use of the years I spent in stretching muscles and cracking joints. Now then, Jack, it's just as I told you."

"Crooked Tip is in the miser's room?" "Of course."

"What doing?" "Feeding a pigeon."

"Anything else?" "What do you mean, Jack?"

"Has he planted his plunder?" "No," was Roxy's encouraging reply.

"Crooked Tip has got the stolen crown jewels of Bokhara right at his elbow."

CHAPTER VII.

VANISHED!

"Good!" commented Nick Carter's young detective, "Roxy, I want to get a sight at that man."

"There's the pipe, Jack," suggested the flower girl, archly.

"I'm not a tight rope walker."

"Well, I guess it would be kind of risky for you, but I'll fix it?"

"How fix it?" "Wait and see."

Roxy was momentarily lost among the shadows of the roof.

She came back from behind a storm house dragging a long plank.

"Help push it across," she directed.

"Where to?" asked Jack.

"The only hold you can get is on the sill of the window, outside the shutters."

"It's a narrow hold."

"And inch is as good as a foot, if it answers the purpose," insisted Roxy, practically.

The board was old and warped, but it was long enough to span the gap and a foot to spare.

Solidly enough it rested upon the stone coping, but Jack did not fancy the light wooden sill it barely lapped across the alley.

"It's safe," spoke Roxy, trying it. "You can surely walk that."

"Oh, certainly!" exclaimed Jack, with

effusiveness, but dubious in his mind, all the same.

He got across on it with only a few dizzyheaded tremors, and noiselessly dropped to the slanting roof.

As Roxy had done, Jack crept up to the attic sashes.

The police had taken old Max, the miser, away that afternoon, but except for his absence the room was the same as when Jack had first visited it.

His eyes sparkled as he made out the man Roxy had so cleverly hunted down.

The Duke of Corva, alias Crooked Tip Barrows, sat at a table.

The dove he was petting was very tame, and seemed to know him familiarly.

It stepped on his fingers and picked stray crumbs from his coat sleeve.

Jack marveled a little at the indifference to possible peril the impostor and robber exhibited.

Jack craned his neck. His breath came quicker as his eyes became glued on a little glistening heap at the elbow of the man in the room below.

"The crown jewels of Bokhara!" he murmured.

There at least was part of them—the wonderful necklace of fabulous value for which General Rodney Muir had offered a princely ransom.

"First, the plunder, then the man," planned Jack. "He's in a trap, and little suspects it. He can't get away, but—I wish I had that necklace in my possession."

Jack felt uneasy. Crooked Tip's nonchalance disturbed him.

He slid back the slanting roof. As his feet touched the gutter he brushed a form, to turn and find Roxy beside him.

"What now, Jack?" she whispered.

"There's our man, and there's the plunder, Roxy, I wish we had that necklace safe."

"When you nab him you nab it, don't you?"

"I hope so. I expect so. Still, I'd like to hurry things. Is there no way of getting to the door of that room from the roof here?"

"Sure."

"How?"

"There's a scuttle."

"Where?"

"You climb over the flat roof where the attic windows come up like the ones of a street car."

"Yes."

"Then across the dormer peak, line the gutter. They've cut a patch beyond, but it can be jumped. Pull up scuttle, drop, and work your way to the hall leading into that room beyond the barrier he's piled on the second story."

Jack listened in dismay at these steps of the cool course marked out by his companion.

"Hardly!" he commented.

"Hardly what?" propounded Roxy.

"Try that."

"I can, and will, if you say so. Jack, it's child's play to me. Don't sit to your head. I know every foot of the place here, you must remember that!"

"But—"

"Just tell me what you want me to do. Is it any point for me to get to the door of that room?"

"A tremendous point, Roxy. I'm afraid of that man. He'd fling that necklace away, rip it to pieces, hide it in some crevice of that old barracks in a minute out."

"If I could get softly up to the door of that room, and sneak in or rush in and grab the necklace, knock him over when he isn't looking—"

"I don't expect that, Roxy."

"What do you want, then?"

"Get to the door, make a noise, distract his attention—"

"Go ahead."

"And I will suddenly rip those shutters off."

Jack got back on the plank spanning the alley as Roxy went up the roof, over it like a sprite.

He examined the shutters. They were old and dusty, and apparently had not been opened for years.

When Roxy's whistle sounded it would grab the iron catch at the edge of the outside one, tear it open, kick the window or boldly crash through, and be ready for action.

Jack was standing on the plank this all this over, getting a weapon in readiness, straining his hearing to catch the whistle that might come at any moment—for Roxy was a spry creature, and

flat roof which like the w her ground thoroughly—when he entered suddenly with dismay.

He had planned to open the shutters—were opened for him.

the inside window must have been up, he did not hear it raised.

abruptly the shutters were pushed out. Crooked Tip was pushing them. Wish-

to open them for some purpose, he sed at them vigorously.

"Stuck like glue!" Jack heard him ter.

ck caught a flashing glimpse of the through the opening centre crack of blinds, but the man did not see him, ently never suspected his proximity.

say so. Wltributing the sturdy resistance of the e. Don't shak to some obstacles for which time ry foot of t decay were responsible, such as a mber that!"ed hinge or a bulging sill, Tip gave a endous push.

want me to ck nearly toppled over at the first get to the deement of the plank.

t the second, from sheer necessity oxy. I'm afraabalance, he stooped and clutched at that neckledge.

ide it in soft distending eyes he saw the plank s in a minute out—one inch, two.

p to the dooren clear off the sill the end grazed, or rush in down it went, carrying Jack with it. him over w swayed from all grasp as it shot d faster.

oxy." ck groped at nothingness.

rapid mental calculation estimated ke a noise, possible result of a forty-foot fall to stone pavement.

Jgh!" was jolted out of Jack, but ip those shutt by a jar than a shock.

order to protect from falling splin-plank spann and mortar pedestrians in the alley up the roof a, which was used as an entrance to the brick structure opposite the ers. They wanted one, a canvas awning had arrently had stretched.

rough this Jack saw the plank dive, le sounded ng its way like an arrow shooting ch at the ceug tissue paper.

it open, kick to himself, he landed on the giving sh through, a and rolled, and then came to a gng sway as if he was nested in big hammock.

the plank thir g a weapon is lay still, thankful for his marvel- hearing to escape from broken bones, listening come at any r dropping crash of the board under ory creature, and looking up at the window he just shot from.

Jack's sole anxiety now was to regain a point whence he could watch the further movements of Tip.

The latter had opened that window for some purpose, and the young detective wanted to be on hand to find out what that purpose was.

"I hope Roxy won't get to the door of that room—don't signal till I get in shape to see what's going on," murmured Jack, hurriedly. "Pshaw!"

A whistle floated on the air, not at all startling, but casual and clear as if the piping call of some street urchin.

"That's Roxy," soliloquized Jack.

He scrambled hurriedly over the edge of the canvas screen, got to the alley, sped to the same door Roxy had entered with him fifteen minutes previous, and was soon back on the same roof whence the plank had been set in place.

From its coping Jack could now command a perfect view of the interior of the room upon which he had projected so daring an assault a few minutes previously.

Its window was up and its shutters were flung wide open.

Just as he fixed his eyes across the alley space, there rang out another whistle. It was the flower girl's second signal.

Roxy was in the room of old Max, the miser.

Jack saw its door come open with a jerk, saw the girl cross the floor like a darting bird.

She reached a stool and picked up something from it that flashed.

"She's got his revolver!" breathed the engrossed Jack.

Back to the door, slamming it shut again, bracing herself against it, and holding out the weapon, girl-like, in both hands, Roxy formed a heroic picture.

Jack missed two things he had last seen in the apartment—the necklace and the dove. They were no longer upon the table.

Crooked Tip was there still, however; all there—what of him was not lost in a shrinking maze of stupefaction and alarm. Half supporting himself erect on the edge of the table he stood with fallen jaws glaring at the intruder.

"Why—why, Roxy!" he stammered.

"Why—why, Roxy!" mimicked the sprightly miss, her eyes flashing like two sparks of fire. "Take your hand out of your breast!"

There Tip's fingers rested and groped. Jack guessed for a weapon.

Roxy seemed to think it, too, for she looked dangerous till Tip's hand came down to his side.

"What do you want, Roxy?" he asked. "What are you doing here?"

"I want you, Crooked Tip Barrows!" she answered, with an icy precision and composure that made the miscreant shiver. "Do you remember when you cut me there with a riding whip?"

Roxy raised one hand to reveal the welt scar beneath her collar.

"I—I didn't know, it was you, Roxy."

"Words come easy to you—most any old kind—don't they?" scoffed the flower girl. "A few hours ago you filled my eyes with red pepper."

"You tackled me like a wild tiger."

"That's twice," pronounced Roxy, steadily. "It's three times and out, though. This is the third, and its my turn now. I want you, Crooked Tip Barrows, and—I've got you!"

Crooked Tip Barrows looked at the deadly level weapon the girl held, and shrank.

He met the steady steely glance she fixed on him, and quailed.

"I—I guess you have, Roxy," he confessed, with an assumption of bravado indifference. "What of it?"

"Justice!"

"Oh, you're bound to get even with me for a little miff, eh?"

Tip looked around him in a lost, uneasy way.

Jack saw a momentary glow of anxiety cross Roxy's face as she glanced past him at the open window.

Notwithstanding his failure to connect in their prearranged scheme, the flower girl had gone steadily on with her part, but he knew she must be anxious for her next cue—at least an indication that he was on deck.

Jack gave as good an imitation as he could of Roxy's late whistle.

Instantly the flower girl's face lightened up, but Tip, bristling like an ani-

mal at double bay, traced an arrow, menace in the signal, and edged to the window.

He glared out of it, saw nothing, led his hand on its sill, and looked sulkily.

"Take care!" warned Roxy.

"Take care what?" Tip hurled savagely.

"Don't try any breaks, such jump. If you want to crack your all right, only—that necklace first!"

"What necklace?"

"As if you didn't know! May I just think I can't shoot?"

"Give it up—Duke of Corva, Crooked Tip Barrow, give it up!"

Tip's hair seemed to rise at this ringing echo of Roxy's mandate.

"I'll baffle you yet!" he hissed.

"No, you won't!" called back and he moved the bright weapon hand so that Tip should make no m as to what it was.

"Won't I?" flared Tip. "Jail m see if the old idiot, Muir, will d make a laughing-stock of himself a toney friends, appearing in a court!"

"Never mind that. We'll get what you stole, just the same—what we're after primarily. For to that girl, Crooked Tip."

"Yes, give me that necklace," s mented Roxy, impatient and imper

"Take it!"

In a hiss and splutter of rage an peration that somehow bore a cert cent of triumph, Crooked Tip sh the words.

His hand went to his breast q lightning. Quick as lightning it out.

"The dove!" cried Roxy, obs what his fingers clutched.

"The necklace!" shouted the sormic Jack, catching the outlines of a harness about the pigeon, and a could bright as star-dust under one f the a wing.

Leaning out of the window faty, w could, Crooked Tip gave the train of a wide upward fling.

"Go!" he voiced.

Straight as a lark, soaring lenses clouds, swift as a dart sent from t brief

traced an unbowed, the carrier dove pierced the and edged to the moonlight.

The crown jewels of Bokhara!" saw nothing, red the malignant, exultant Tip—d looked sulky Nick Carter and all his meddling d to follow that carrier dove, to trace ed Roxy. "In those jewels—if they can!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NECKLACE TRAIL.

breaks, such as to crack your necklace first!" Nick Carter's young detective had rare- itnessed so sensational an exploit as know! Maybe just enacted by Crooked Tip Bar-

ke of Cotva, "airly dazed, Jack stood helplessly give it up!" ng at the swift-winged messenger to rise at this was conveying away into uncertainty mandate. obscurity the famous crown jewels of hara.

"he hissed. " called back he crafty impostor and thief had right weapon if ed outwitted them! the other end of that queer express

what bulk of valuables might not be

Tip. "Jail me Muir, will da k of himself ar aring in a and now the king-haul of the season, famous crown jewels of Bokhara, been added to the secret, ill-gotten

at. We'll get ck felt as if half the glory of the st the same— had vanished, and his weapon imarily. Fork ped nervelessly to his side.

Tip." t necklace," st e saw within the lighted room across tient and imper illey space Roxy's face whiten.

Oh, you wretched schemer!" she red out, with a temper-snap of her teeth.

You keep back!" called Tip, as Roxy rooked Tip shu ced upon him. "Don't quite mass- e!"

his breast qu e reached out as if in alarm at the as lightning it ing pistol, and picked up a big cot- imrella that chanced to stand in the

ed Roxy, obser- tched.

his he waved, a feeble guard to the shouted the s formidabile armament of his young outlines of a

pigeon, and a could scratch your eyes out!" de- under one flat the angry little miss. "Oh, Jack!

he's fooled us at the last!"

the window far xy, woman-like, weakened at the gave the trainent of critical juncture.

e was ready to cry with vexation,

her emotion momentarily took her

dark, soaring fenses off guard.

art sent from the brief dropping of the revolver was

watchful Tip's opportunity, and he took immediate advantage of it.

So quickly that neither Jack nor Roxy had time to recover poise, he was on the window sill.

With a brushing whirl, he shot up the umbrella top.

Daring and desperate to the point of recklessness, holding to the handle, Tip gave a jump.

Down he went, no faster than if he had a well-devised parachute in his grasp.

Jack stared at his receding form in a blank kind of a way.

Ten feet from the canvas screen into which he himself had recently landed, disaster overtook the venturesome Tip.

With a snap and a whir the umbrella top, unable to withstand the tremendous air pressure, flopped back entire.

Tip dropped plumb. Had he struck the canvas in the centre, all would have been well with him.

Instead, by some perversity or award of fate, his feet landed where the plank had torn a gaping hole in the cloth.

Straight through this he went. A distinct groan followed a heavy thud.

Jack, glancing over at the open window, saw that Roxy had disappeared from the miser's room.

Her celerity in getting below shamed him to prompt action.

He was off the roof and down the stairs as fast as his feet could carry him.

He came upon a senseless form and a hovering one under the alley screen.

Roxy was ahead of him. She was flustered and breathless from a breakneck descent and a vivid run.

"He won't need any come-alongs," she commented, tersely, pointing to the mute, prostrate form lying across the stone slabs.

"Is he badly hurt?"

"One arm broken, head horribly crushed. It's the ambulance, instead of the patrol wagon, Jack."

A police ambulance call was soon sent in; there was the usual confusion incidental to an accident.

As all was ready to convey the injured thief to the hospital, Jack went over to where Roxy stood silent and pensive.

"Come and see Mr. Carter to-morrow," he spoke.

"No, I won't come to Mr. Carter, unless——"

The flower girl paused.

"Well, Roxy?"

"Unless I find out something new."

"Why! what is there to find out?" projected Jack, a little curious.

"About the jewels, of course."

"Oh!"

Jack made no further comment, but he secretly admired the grit and determination of his tireless ally.

"She's a loyal one—makes a fellow feel she's a friend worth having, and a genuine, all-through little lady!" he soliloquized, ardently.

Crooked Tip Barrows had run his last sneak, the police surgeon at the hospital reported, after a cursory examination of the injured criminal.

Aside from a broken limb, Tip had received injuries to his head that were serious, if not fatal, and it would be two weeks at the least before he would be able to move, or even clearly understand what was going on about him.

Jack made a search of Tip's garments.

He found nothing, however, that was a clue to city associates or the woman who operated the other end of the mysterious carrier dove line.

He was depressed and dissatisfied as he accompanied Larry and Buff home to Nick Carter's.

The veteran detective was in bed, and anxious as Jack was to report the new phases of the case, he declared that it would not spoil by waiting till morning.

All interest now must naturally centre on the person or persons who had received the stolen jewels.

For all he knew, the writer of the cipher note, who was undoubtedly the operator of the other end of the carrier pigeon route, might be hundreds of miles away.

Jack had heard of these wonderful trained doves winging a three days' flight at the rate of over forty miles an hour.

He was tired, and he soon fell asleep, despite his anxious perplexities.

Nick freshened up his laggard ardor with some practical advice, immediately after breakfast next morning.

The veteran detective advised a con-

stant watch on all visitors to Tip's hospital.

He directed a visit to the old m^{is} room and a thorough inspection o^{is} same.

"Some of the miser's customers come haunting the place," said t^{he} detective.

"Get a trace, if you can, through of Tip's associates and affiliations. in

"And fix your energies on one point: the destination of the pigeons."

Jack spent three hours that m^{is} about the old tenements. Oh!

An exhaustive search, ho^{ur} brought to light not so much as a^o of writing.

The doves had gone. Even the one had disappeared.

That afternoon the rest of the bu^{is} was to be torn down, so that ended was^h influence in the case in hand.

Jack spent the rest of the day^{ell} scurry through the district, running ran^g points bearing on Crooked Tip's re^{ce}

He found out considerable abo^{ut} man, met many acquaintances and tol^{ed} of the injured criminal, but non^{uld} had latterly had any dealings with do^{ne}

In their vernacular, Crooked Ti^{re} been flying for higher game th^{an} aimed at, recently.

Jack came home at dusk, dispth and impatient with the slow routin^{and} he must continue to follow out ewe^l only resource promising a final t^{sa} the secret hoard of the injured thi^l

He decided he would visit Rox^{pt} evening.

His little friend was sharp, sh^o bright, and her fresh mind mig^{ht} taken in some hints in the case t^h own had passed over.

Almost instantly after enterin^g Whi^{ch} house, however, Jack was hailed^{be} patron.

"Want to see me, Mr. Carter?"^{t su} quired Jack, eagerly, as he enter^{Tha} library.

"I do, Jack," nodded Nick—^{as sh} seat."

"You've got something to t^h about this perplexing case I'm b^h ing on, Mr. Carter?"^{ch ei} guessed Jack

"That's right."

1 visitors to Tip as as good as settled!" declared Jack. sit to the old m ugh inspection of,

miser's customers Who?" e place," said t Roxy."

The flower girl!"

you can, through and affiliations. energies on one lation of the hours that m nents. Oh! then, she hasn't been here?"

search, how t so much as a mured Jack, disappointedly.

No, she wrote."

A letter!"

Read it."

ck handed Jack a folded missive his desk. was written in a plain, clear hand, showed that Roxy had learned how rest of the bu in hand. ell right.

rest of the day district, running ran:

crooked Tip's rec

onsiderable abo

quaintances and t minal, but none y dealings with lar, Crooked Ti gher game than

In Max the miser's room I found a that Crooked Tip Barrows had writ and hadn't time to send away with jewels and the pigeon.

It said to who he was sending the pl: 'Get rid of all the stuff you have pt these. Hide these till you hear me.'

I also happened to pick up the dead te pigeon, because I know a poor old bow who makes a living stuffing and inting birds.

While he was fixing it, he said it be a fine breed of the carrier kind of ons, because whoever owned it had me, Mr. Carter, it such expensive food.

ly, as he entered That set me thinking. I got question- odded Nick— "s showed that the last meal of the had been made on Singapore milk

omething to te ing case I'm bi This, he said, is an expensive luxury?" guessed Jack th eighteen dollars a pound, bought

only for fine carrier doves, to give them strength and endurance.

"I found out where it was sold. I went to the place, and learned that only three customers had bought any such seed inside of three months.

"I knew that miserly old Max would never spend eighteen dollars a pound for pigeon food.

"I ran down two of the customers—bird fanciers up town.

"The third customer was a woman.

"A woman sent the white pigeon back with that message, Jack said.

"Tell Jack I ran the woman down.

"Tell Jack she's the other end of the carrier dove line.

"I know this—because—I've managed to get hired by her as a maid.

"Tell Jack, how's that? and not to spoil the crown jewel case by too much hurry.

"But if he will hang around the address on the back here, and watch the left last window on the second floor between nine and ten o'clock to-morrow morning, I will do the rest. Roxy."

"Why, Mr. Carter!" cried the astonished Jack, "this is wonderful! The girl has made a detective run in twenty-four hours that is simply phenomenal. Can she have really found the woman who wrote the cipher note?"

"In the hypothesis of sound logic and natural clue deduction—yes."

"What have you to say to that?"

"I say," responded Nick Carter, "clever girl!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

"That's the place!"

Jack Burton spoke the words passing the house that represented the address that Roxy had given in her characteristic report to Nick Carter.

It was one of a block in a little half-residence, half-business street way out in the purlieus of Brooklyn.

Underneath was an empty store. The street door of the flat was closed, all the shades upstairs were drawn.

Jack passed the house twice. The second time he turned the next corner with a satisfied face.

"She's there—Roxy is on hand as she said she'd be!" he declared.

Caught in a lowered sash, and trailing casually over the sill, as if placed there to dry, was a trifle of lace—Roxy's collar.

"There's the pigeons!"

Jack said this half an hour later—said it lining the alley at the rear of the house.

Passing a garbage box, Jack saw lying among the debris three dead pigeons.

A single close glance told him whose they had been, for one wore the harness bands that had crossed the back of the dove Crooked Tip Barrows had sent aloft with the stolen necklace.

"No guess work now," reflected Jack. "Here's the other end of the carrier dove line, sure!"

Roxy had hinted in her note that Jack should not "rush things," but after the young detective had put in an hour or more of watching the place, he felt like forcing issues.

He had no means of knowing Roxy had not made some stumble that had betrayed her into trouble. The lack of motion about the house irritated him.

Jack had come prepared for emergencies. With a flexible covered sample he had brought with him, he started in to do the block as a book canvasser.

There was no bell to 394. Jack turned the knob.

"Here's luck!" he muttered, as it gave.

Jack went softly up the stairs. He looked through the open doorway of the first room he came to.

A lady's writing desk stood open in one corner of the apartment.

Jack tiptoed to it. He expected the envelopes that littered it to tell him some kind of a story.

He glided into a little ornamental chair standing near the desk, and leaned eagerly forward to take the outspread litter within a comprehensive glance.

"Pshaw!"

Jack got up promptly.

"Put my foot in it!" he supplemented, and then he bent his ear.

The minute Jack sat down, the chair had "started up."

That is, it was one of those music box chairs operated by pressure, and Jack's weight had started a tune going.

He heard a rustle in an adjoining apartment as of some one rising from a couch. She seemed—Jack

Before he could reach the door some industry was all draperies parted, and a large, dark woman with keen, piercing eyes confronted him.

"What do you want?" she demanded, square piece sharply.

"My dear madam, there was no bell," explained Jack, volubly. "Pardon the intrusion, but I have here a wonderful a discovery. "Building

Such the trated square in their A

The woman these along "W," re Watch out

With a s woman de quickly as

"A figur A word and to the came the graphing "Well,

The sig two minu "Who" gated Jac

He cra sideways. So far on the st

"Who was insi here," J He d lead befo He go ward t somethi through

"I've got to stay around till she gives me some definite signal," he decided, "but I can't parade in view again—that woman is watching."

Jack guessed that Roxy was waiting for some discoveries, or developments that had not yet come along.

"I've got to stay around till she gives me some definite signal," he decided, "but I can't parade in view again—that woman is watching."

Jack crossed the street, went down the side avenue and dodged into the alley, running behind the row of houses and stores fronting 394.

He was pretty well satisfied, when he gained a favorable position in the basement of an unoccupied house nearly opposite the one he had just visited.

The shade of one window and its sash as well was clear up now.

About it hovered the woman Jack had seen.

g apart. She seemed to be tidying up—but only coucheeemed—Jack soon discerned that her industry was all a pretense.

dark Suddenly she fixed her glance almost directly across the street.

Then she began tumbling over a lot of anded, square pieces of wood that littered the inside window sill.

bell," Jack, studying a purpose in the way in the she began to handle these, abruptly made derful discovery.

"Building blocks," he guessed.

Such they were—the alphabet illustrated squares so popular with children white in their A B C's.

quick The woman began to place a row of tickly these along the ledge.

"W," read Jack—"A-T-C-H hello! 'ran 'Watch out!'"

break With a sweep of her jeweled hand the woman destroyed the vivid sentence as quickly as she had formed it.

"A figure came next—"4."

A word followed. "G-R-A-V-E"—and to the floor went the blocks, down came the shades, and the unique telegraphing was over.

"Well," whistled the interested Jack.

The signaling had not taken more than two minutes of time.

"Who's she been talking to?" interrogated Jack, eagerly.

He craned his neck and tried to look sideways.

So far as he could see, not a person was on the street.

"Whoever she signaled to, that person was inside some of the stores along here," Jack decided.

He determined to follow up this new lead before it became a complication.

He got out of the basement, well toward the alley, and then, thinking of something, darted across a yard and through the doorway of a shed.

"'Watch out!'" he soliloquized, stripping off his coat. "That means she suspects being watched. She has an accomplice, and is warning him. 'Four.' Does that mean that at four o'clock something comes off—then, 'Grave.' I can't guess that out. At any rate, I'll put in a few minutes trying to find out who she signaled to."

Jack wore what Nick Carter's pupils designated as "a lightning change suit."

A mere turn over altered the color of his attire.

He abandoned his natty bicycle cap for a low slouch hat.

He removed his false mustache, he rumpled up his hair, and was an entirely different-looking person from the neat, handsome book canvasser as could be well concluded, when he got through his transformation.

Just leaving the shed, Jack confronted a man who had come out from the building, in front.

"Hey, you!" he hailed, "what are you doing in there?"

"I ain't in there—I'm just coming out?" retorted Jack.

"Pretty cool, seems to me!"

"What! changing a fellow's collar? I ain't stealing any of your wood."

The man seemed a little daunted at Jack's brusque manner, and muttered something about "tramps."

"Where's the other fellow?" he asked.

"What other fellow?" demanded Jack.

"That I saw go in here, too."

"Oh, I guess there was no one but me."

The man looked dissatisfied with this statement, and Jack hurried away regretting that he had been seen both before and after his change to a new disguise.

He came boldly out into the street in front, however, for the shades of 394 were down again, and he felt positive that the woman who had signaled with the building blocks would not know him if she saw him.

It took very little inspection and thought to fix upon the place she had telegraphed to.

"That little barber shop," decided Jack. "Yes, that's the only place in her range of view that looks likely, and that fellow at the door—he seems scared and uneasy."

The man in question verified Jack's suspicions by looking repeatedly with furtiveness at the shaded window across the street.

Jack followed a quick impulse, and just passing the barber shop entered it.

Somehow, it struck him that the place did not look as if much business was going on there.

Its location was against it—it had no

sign in front, its single chair was far back in the shadow, and the man who followed him in did not have a tonsorial look.

Jack threw himself into the chair in a careless rough-and-tumble way.

"Fix up my hair a little, will you?" he spoke. "Rats slept in it last night."

As the man proceeded to his task, Jack knew from the way he handled comb and brush he was no adept at the trade.

He was uncommunicative, when Jack tried to draw him out, answering only in monosyllables.

He was hurrying to get rid of what was evidently an unwelcome customer, when the back door opened and a man entered.

Jack started at his reflection in the glass, and he saw the man start also as he ran his eye over him quickly.

"The fellow who challenged me in the shed!" muttered Jack.

The man spoke a hurried sentence. It was in a foreign language or a queer jargon.

It sounded so like a menace, a sharp order, that Jack felt that he was on the edge of trouble.

Getting ready to start from the chair at the first demonstration of danger, two things happened very quickly, anticipating his own movements.

The last comer slammed the open door of the shop close shut.

The man behind the chair gave it a tip, squeezed its occupant forcibly and hurriedly back against the head rest, and kicked free a lever under it.

The next instant he sprang back free of a trap suddenly opened in the floor.

And the next, down through this shot the chair, and Jack with it.

CHAPTER X.

THE GREEN FLOWER POT.

Jack's plunge carried him into darkness and insensibility, and for fully two hours he knew nothing.

Then, rousing up, he discovered that he was in some underground space solidly shut in and nearly twenty feet deep.

By the aid of matches he guessed from paper wrappings and boxes that this had been a sort of storage vault for all kinds of plunder.

He doubted not as well that many an

unuspicious victim with money had been lured to that moving barber chair and shot out of the world promptly.

"This is an appendix of the flat across the street, just as that was of old Max, the miser, and he of Crooked Tip," reflected Jack. "Those fellows must have guessed who I am. What are they going to do with me?"

As no move was made to visit him or recover the chair, Jack set his most energetic wits at work to escape.

"Not a sound up stairs," he noted. "This bold move and the abandonment of the chair looks as if they have urged up a break-loose all along the line. Suppose the woman gets suspecting Roxy? She's got hard eyes, and lots at stake. I must work my way to daylight as fast as I can."

There was the chair, some loose stones in the cellar wall, some old pieces of rusted stove pipe—that was all the cellar contained.

Jack built and rebuilt experimental platforms of these.

At last, balancing on a frail support, his fingers touched the trap-door; he pushed it up, and he got a hold to the floor edge just as his lofty climbing structure went down with a grand crash.

Jack found the barber shop deserted. Shades were down, doors locked, and empty drawers and slabs told a story of hasty packing up and flight.

"I can reason it out," he soliloquized. "All hands are going to break camp. These fellows are warned by the woman; '4—grave' is their cue. That 4! Does it mean a fixed hour? If so, I'm in time."

It was now about one o'clock. Jack found a break in a shade that afforded a perfect view of the building opposite.

The key was on the inside of the front door—he could get out at a moment's notice.

Jack felt slightly at sea, but he was sure he could not miss it keeping a watch on 394.

His vigilance was rewarded. At about two o'clock the front door of the house opposite opened.

Out came the woman he had met that forenoon.

Jack had to judge this from form and

hitions, for the woman was dressed in deep mourning and veiled heavily.

Following her, and carrying something bulky and high about which a newspaper was pinned, was Roxy.

They proceeded down the street. A neighbor sweeping off her steps spoke to the woman in black.

There was a brief confab. Then Roxy and her mistress proceeded on their way.

Jack turned the key in the door of the barber shop as they turned the next corner.

He crossed the street rapidly, but lessened his gait as he heard the woman sweeping her steps challenged by her next door neighbor.

"Was that Mrs. Latour?" asked the latter.

"Yes. She is going to move," was the response.

"When?"

"This evening. She is going west, she says."

"What was that her new maid was carrying?"

"A geranium plant. She is going to place it on her husband's grave."

"Oh! up at the little cemetery? She is always fussing about that plant, and mourning her poor husband. Queer woman—so secretive and suspicious acting."

"Thanks, ladies!" muttered Jack. "I've got my pointer. 'The little cemetery,' I begin to see what 'grave' means."

Jack did not further shadow Roxy and her mistress.

He felt that his convictions were worth a risk.

He was sure that the little cemetery, at 4 o'clock, would witness some climax in the doings of the mysterious Mrs. Latour.

An inquiry from a storekeeper directed him to a small cemetery about half a mile distant.

Its iron gate stood open. No one was about. Jack made for a clump of thick dwarf pines on a plot of ground near the centre of the place.

Stowed there in complete hiding, he watched and waited.

His senses grew more alert as he saw two familiar forms come slowly through

the iron gateway—Mrs. Latour and Roxy.

Nearing a mound about fifteen feet away, the woman knelt upon it, and producing a little trowel, proceeded to bed a small circular base in the turf.

Roxy had removed the wrappings from her burden.

Jack saw a thrifty geranium set in a large green painted flower pot.

This Mrs. Latour lifted into the circular hole she had cut, patted the sod about it neatly, and then taking out her handkerchief put it under her veil.

Apparently, for the space of five minutes, she was convulsed with the deepest grief.

"My poor dear husband—this is the last office of respect I can perform for him!" she spoke to Roxy, brokenly.

"He must have had two names!" commented keen-eyed Jack—"for on the little slab there it says 'Darthrow,' instead of 'Latour.' What's the object of this piece of acting, anyway?"

It was now only three o'clock—he heard a distant bell sound that hour.

"Four" was what the building block signal had said.

Was the woman going to wait here?"

No, she was preparing to leave at once.

Jack hardly knew what to do. He feared losing sight of her.

The two men from the barber shop had not shown up, nor did the woman seem to be expecting them.

He decided to apprise Roxy of his presence—that might bring some direction or indication from his bright little ally.

He gave a low quick imitation of her favorite whistle—the one she had employed in announcing her arrival in the miser's room when Crooked Tip had been cornered.

The woman started slightly at the sound. Roxy preserved a superb pose of composure.

"What was that?" inquired the woman—"a bird?"

"Some boy, I suppose," came Roxy's response. "Madam, are we going now?"

"Yes, my dear," replied the woman. "Oh! how can I ever leave New York, and my poor dead husband behind me!"

There was a new flood of emotion set loose under the black veil.

"If I had a friend in this beautiful cemetery, I would feel quite resigned to leave him here," spoke Roxy, raising her voice distinctly.

"Good for you!" muttered Jack. "If that isn't a broad hint for me to stay right here and let her work her end of the affair, there never was one. That little jewel is bright as a dollar!"

Jack felt completely satisfied now, that Roxy did not need his co-operation so far as the woman was concerned.

When they had departed, he fixed his eyes on the green flower pot.

He was thinking out some pretty complicated theories, when he saw two men come through the cemetery gate.

They looked well back of them. Then they proceeded rather quickly to the mound which Mrs. Latour had just visited.

Jack started into quick interest. One of the men was the barber who had shot him into the cellar, the other the man who had caught him disquising himself.

"Ahead of time," remarked the latter.

"The green flower pot isn't," said the other.

"That's so, and that's our cue. Come ahead."

The fake barber leaned over and lifted and shouldered the green flower pot.

Jack's eyes began to open wider. They dilated still more as the other man roughly broke off the plant at the roots and tossed it carelessly aside.

"I see," murmured Jack. "Oh, yes, I see perfectly, clearly, now!"

"Not that way," spoke the larger fellow of the two sharply, as his companion started for the front of the cemetery.

"Why not?"

"The street wall at the back is safer—quiet lane—must be cautious, you know?"

Jack lifted out his revolver—got ready to start after the men.

They made for a brick wall that lined the rear of the place.

Jack darted from cover as they reached it.

"Oh, bother!" he heard one of them say.

"Two policemen! We don't want to go that way."

"You can't come this!"

"Eh?"

"Confusion!"

"Hand down that flower pot!"

Jack's two sharp statements sandwiched in between the dismayed ejaculations of the fellows.

The signal trolleyman to the fugitive

Jack told the station

They recognized him instantly, asked that the their faces fell.

"Jump over—make a dash—those officers may not see us!" breathed the fellow, quickly.

"Don't try it!" advised Jack.

"Do as I say!"

Bang!

Over the top of the wall both men leaped.

Jack had fired.

His bullet grazed the arm that clung around the green flower pot.

The man let go of it with a sharp cry of pain.

As he tumbled over the outside of the wall, the flower pot rolled down the incline.

With a crash it struck a stone, and split open directly at the feet of Nick Carter's young detective.

A golden, glowing flood poured out.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROLL OF HONOR.

The secret hoard of old Max the miser had come to light.

A single flashing glance at the contents of the green flower pot told Jack this.

Underneath a thin layer of dirt, there had reposed watches, rings, bracelets, chains, jewels.

All the recently acquired booty of Crooked Tip, except the crown jewels of Bokhara, the priceless necklace, seemed to be comprised in the glittering heap.

Mrs. Latour had that, probably, but Roxy was after it—keen, shrewd Roxy, who had advised Jack to wait in the cemetery to some advantage!

With something of admiration for the clever league that had run the safest fence he had ever run down, Jack made for the fugitives.

He knew they were as good as caught, so he got some as a police signal rang out.

The two officers the men had seen, and aroused at their suspicious haste, had put them after them.

The signal they gave brought another trolman to the other end of the lane. The fugitives were cornered, and in the eye of four revolvers threw up their hands.

Jack told the officers who he was, and asked that the prisoners be taken quietly to the station, and not booked nor allowed to send or receive messages till he reported to them.

Then he made up a bundle of the contents of the green flower pot, and asked them to take charge of it also for the present.

Half an hour later he came in sight of the home of Mrs. Latour.

A one-horse conveyance stood in front of it.

"Going away, eh?" he muttered. "Just in time, then!"

Jack went around to the rear, deciding to get into the house some way.

"I guess an arrest and a showing up of hands is in order," he soliloquized. "Hello! there's action. Why—Roxy!"

An exciting scene was in progress at the flat Jack was making for.

It had a blind veranda. Out upon this Roxy had just darted.

She bore in both arms the drawer of the bureau or cabinet, filled with papers. Roxy glanced across the veranda. From it ran a four-foot walk to a bare railed-in platform.

In the centre of this was a post, and across pulleys ran taut wire ropes.

These slanted to pulleys in the shed, in the fence, in a ground post purposely set up there.

They formed one of those clothes-drying equipments which can be loaded and manipulated conveniently from one spot.

Roxy rested the drawer on the platform railing, looked below, saw a bad drop, and hesitated.

Just then out upon the veranda flew Mrs. Latour, dressed for the street.

"Oh, you treacherous minx!" panted the woman.

"I'll fight for this!" cried Roxy.

The woman rang back into the kitchen to get some missile or weapon.

Roxy sprang to the rail of the platform, and sighted the wire rope running down across the yard to the side of the shed.

Her hand went into her pocket.

Out came that queer contrivance she had laughingly showed Jack the first day they became acquainted.

It was a small wire hooked device with a gutta percha mouthpiece.

Just such as Jack had seen "the woman with the iron jaw" time and again hang to by sheer strength of the teeth, while sliding across a wire or swinging dizzily from a trapeze.

Roxy had told him that her money-loving uncle had made her practice with it when he was trying to make her the infant prodigy.

This the flower girl now attached to the slanting rope.

She inserted the mouthpiece behind her teeth.

She grabbed up the drawer in both arms.

As Mr. Latour reached her side, an iron poker in her hand, Roxy swung off from the railing.

"Bravo!"

Jack stood transfixed, but the enthusiastic eulogy was forced involuntarily from his lips.

Roxy slid the wire as if it was greased—head rigid, teeth firmly clutching the mouthpiece.

"Drop!" shouted Jack, getting near to her landing point, and bracing himself to prevent a destructive slam against the shed.

Down came Roxy into the arms of the young detective, slipped to the ground, but never let go of the drawer.

Jack looked up. The woman on the veranda glared at him with a baffled face.

"I must nab her!" spoke Jack.

"Yes, don't let her go—she is leaving the city," panted Roxy.

Jack started up the yard stairs. The woman ran for the open kitchen door.

It came slam shut in Jack's face, and he heard her running for the front of the house.

Over a porch partition he bounded, burst open the door of the next flat, and was through two rooms, down the first stairway and out in the street, followed by the frightened shrieks of the alarmed denizens of the place.

Mrs. Latour was just springing into a carriage,

"Whip him up—get me away—a hundred dollars!" she gasped to the driver.

Jack sprang at the horse's head. The man reversed his whip and aimed a blow at him.

Jack deftly slipped a strap buckle loose, dropped the bit, and dodged the blow of the angry driver.

Before the man could get down from his seat a crowd was gathering.

Jack pressed two men into service to subdue the Jehu, while he saw to it that the hysterical, rage-filled Mrs. Latour was closely taken care of till a policeman arrived.

An enlightening word to the officer, and Jack ran around to the rear yard of the place again.

Roxy was resting on the edge of the paper-filled drawer.

"What you got there?" asked Jack, curiously.

"Papers that establish the whole chain of the operations of old Max's fence," was the reply, "from the dove cote to the men in Philadelphia who melt down the metal and ship the jewels abroad."

Jack could not find words to express the ardent praise he felt to be the due of his plucky little ally.

His admiring eyes spoke plainly, though, as he asked the question:

"The necklace, Roxy—the crown jewels of Bokhara?"

Roxy put her hand to her throat. She unclasped that royally magnificent cluster of gems that General Rodney Muir had offered a fortune to recover.

As she did so, Jack caught sight, too, of the scar of the welt that Crooked Tip Barrows had made with his riding whip.

"I saw the woman was making off, and I made a break for these papers," exclaimed Roxy, "and the necklace, for I have had my eyes on both since yesterday, when I played it hard to get her to hire me as a maid. Are you satisfied, Jack?"

"Satisfied! Roxy, you had ought to be chief of detectives!"

"Well," answered the little lady, demurely, "I had to get even with Crooked Tip Barrows and earn that two dollars some way, you know."

Nick Carter had his wish that evening.

He met face to face the clever girl who

had helped a member of his detective school win the case of his life.

When he told Roxy she had been the means of breaking up completely one of the most formidable confederations of crime New York had ever held, she only flushed modestly.

When he added that General Rodney Muir had directed him to see that she and her aunt were placed in a position where their daily bread would be something more than an assured fact for many years to come, she looked grateful.

"And what does Jack get?" murmured Roxy, earnestly.

"Oh! I get the experience of training with the cleverest natural-born detective I ever met," smiled her hero, "and half the credit of recovering the crown jewels of Bokhara."

"You did it all, Jack!" declared Roxy, positively. "Who wouldn't be glad to do their level best for a boy who treats a poor flower girl like a little lady? Mr. Carter has made me a real young lady, Jack—and to think of the kind things you've all done for me!"

There was something in the frankness, in the genuine professional pride of the brave little lady that won the esteem and respect of every person in the room, and nothing more was said just then.

But when Roxy, the flower girl, left the apartment, the rapt admiration of enthusiastic hearts broke loose.

And the members of Nick Carter's detective school gave three cheers for Nick Carter's girl detective.

[THE END.]

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